

Complaints policy & procedures

School governing bodies are required, under Section 29 of the Education Act 2002, to have in place a procedure for dealing with complaints.

Purpose

This policy aims to reassure parents/carers and others with an interest in the school:

- that any complaint against the school will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a speedy and satisfactory resolution
- that the school recognises that a willingness to listen to questions and to respond positively to complaints, can lead to improvements in school practices and provision for students.

The policy is designed to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- be easy to understand and follow
- ensure a full, fair and independent investigation where needed
- respect people's right to privacy and confidentiality
- provide management information to the school leadership team and the governing body

The person investigating will make sure that they:

- establish what has happened and identify who is involved
- make contact with the complainant and keep them informed
- identify what the complainant believes would put things right
- conduct interviews with an open mind and a neutral approach
- keep records of complaints and what actions have been agreed

Scope

A concern is defined as *an expression of worry or doubt over an issue for which reassurances are sought*. A complaint is defined as *a clear expression of dissatisfaction about any specified aspect of the school's work*.

This policy deals with specified complaints about the management and/or operation of the school.

Certain types of complaints have separate statutory procedures and are not covered by this policy. This includes complaints about school admissions, fixed term or permanent exclusions, statutory SEN assessments, complaints covered by the Education (School Records) Regulations 1989, claims against the school such as disability discrimination and allegations relating to child protection and safeguarding matters.

Complaints that must be dealt with by specific employment procedures for example allegations of professional misconduct, criminal offences or those that are potentially staff disciplinary issues will be dealt with under internal school procedures.

Complainants may be anyone including parents, carers, neighbours of the school or any person with an interest in the work of the school. However, it is expected that it will be mainly parents/carers who will make use of the policy. Therefore the term 'parent' is used

throughout as a generic term but the policy also applies in relation to any other type of complainant.

General

Records of complaints will be kept and copies of correspondence and notes will be kept on file in the school's records, separately from individual student records.

There may be rare occasions when, despite all the stages of the procedure having been followed, a parent remains dissatisfied. If the parent seeks to reopen the same issue, the school reserves the right to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed.

Complaints will be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. The time limits set within this policy will be adhered to wherever possible, however where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the extended deadline, with an explanation of the reasons for extending.

Where complaints are made about events that took place more than 6 months earlier, or where a student concerned has left the school, the school reserves the right to not consider those complaints through this policy, for example where proper investigation would not be possible given the passage of time. However, the Governing Body will consider exceptions to this timeframe where there are exceptional circumstances. Decisions will be made on a case by case basis by the Headteacher and Chair of governors.

Complaints may be made by telephone, e-mail, in person or in writing.

If a parent has difficulty in writing or communicating their complaint for example, where English is not their first language or they have a disability, assistance and alternative methods of contact will be arranged.

Complaints about the Headteacher

Complaints that are specifically about the Headteacher and which cannot be resolved informally at stage one should be sent as a formal letter of complaint to the Chair of governors. Send the letter to the Clerk to the governing body marked Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of governors or an individual governor

Complaints about the chair of governors or an individual governor should be made in writing to the Clerk to the governing body. Send the letter to the Clerk marked Private and Confidential.

Complaints procedure

Stage one – informal

Talk to the class teacher or relevant member of staff

Most concerns can be resolved quickly and effectively by the class teacher or the relevant member of staff. Contact the school to make an appointment or to find out when the member of staff is available to talk to you. You can also make contact by letter or email. The aim at this stage is to establish the nature of the concern and to find a realistic and speedy resolution to the problem.

Stage two – informal

Contact the relevant Head of Department/Head of College or Assistant Headteacher

If you were not able to resolve your concern with the member of staff at stage one you should then contact the relevant Head of Department, Head of College or Assistant Headteacher. Arrange an appointment to discuss the matter further. The aim at this stage is to establish the nature of the ongoing concern, what has been discussed with the school so far and what actions, if any, have already been taken. You will receive a response within 10 school days.

It is hoped that most problems will be resolved through the informal stages of this procedure.

Stage three – formal

Contact the Headteacher

If your concern is still unresolved you may wish to pursue it further by raising it formally with the Headteacher. Send your complaint in writing, by letter or email, to the Headteacher. You should explain clearly the concern that has previously been discussed at stage one and stage two and why you feel that the issue is still not resolved. Explain what you think might resolve the matter. The Headteacher will investigate or nominate another senior member of staff to deal with the matter on her behalf. The Headteacher will respond in writing within 15 school days of the date of receipt of your complaint.

Stage four – formal

Complaint to the Chair of governors

If you are not satisfied with the response from the Headteacher, or if the complaint directly concerns the Headteacher, you can make a formal written complaint to the Chair of governors. Email the Clerk to governors at governors@fortismere.org.uk. The Clerk will forward your letter or email to the Chair of governors.

Individual governors who receive complaints will refer them to the Headteacher or Chair of governors as appropriate and will not become further involved themselves unless requested to do so by the Chair of governors.

The Chair of governors will investigate or arrange for a group of governors (two or three) to investigate the complaint. Governors will arrange to meet with you and others involved to discuss the matter. You will receive a written response within 20 school days of the date that the Chair of governors received the complaint. The governors' decision is final and represents the end of the school's complaints procedure.

Governors can:

- offer an apology, an explanation or an admission that the situation could have been handled differently
- undertake to review policies and procedures in light of the complaint to ensure problems of a similar nature do not recur
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part

Taking matters further

If following a formal complaint at stage four a parent feels that the Governing Body has acted unreasonably, they can consider complaining to the Secretary of State for Education and in some circumstances Ofsted may consider a complaint about a school.

Advice for parents about making a complaint to the Secretary of State for Education or Ofsted can be found on the Gov.uk website at www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

Agreed by governing body: 7 March 2016

Next review due: March 2018